Introduction

The Department of Mathematics & Computer Science did not have a PhD Council before the end of 2013. For the Speech 2015 event in June 2013, representatives of each group within the department (such as the secretaries, PhDs, and UDs) were asked to reflect on the current state of the department, and provide their view on what could be improved within upcoming years. One primary issue the PhDs noted was a lack of community within the department. The speech written jointly by the PhDs led to a proposal to form a PhD Council within the department.

Efforts after the Speech 2015 event focused on setting up a PhD Council, and getting involved with both the community and the decision-taking process within the department. This would be achieved by organizing events for the PhDs, and attending meetings with board representatives and the full professors, substantiated with a budget allocation from the department board.

This document presents the first annual report of the PhD Council, which contains an overview of all activities and goals set out after Speech 2015 (June 2013) until July 2015.

Setup of the PhD Council

Structure

Since PhDs are temporary employees of the university, with contracts typically for four years, there is a natural continuous in- and outflow of PhDs. As it stands now, there is no official election procedure, and volunteers for the PhD Council are regularly asked to organise events. At any time, approximately ten PhDs are member of the PhD council, representing approximately ten percent of the total population. It has been our goal to ensure that the council consist of at least one representative from each research group within the department. Three fixed functions are the chair (who schedules meetings, proposes agendas and attends department meetings), the secretary (who handles incoming / outgoing messages and invitations), and the CFO (who handles declarations and the budget). To ensure continuation within the PhD council itself, newer members regularly take over tasks of the more senior members. This allows new members to get briefly accustomed to ongoing matters, and we have found that senior members often naturally wish to focus more and more on finishing their PhD towards the end of their contract.

Tasks

Every member of the PhD Council is appointed one or more tasks or themes as their focus. These include being part of an activity committee, taking care of the alumni and company contacts, dealing with the department contacts (usually fulfilled by the chair), engaging in first aid topics, maintaining social media / website. Of these tasks the organization of activities entails often the most work, because regular events are scheduled catered to the goals of the PhD council.

Organization

The PhD council meets bi-monthly, once after each (monthly) TOP meeting to communicate the messages to the council and one other meeting is scheduled mostly to discuss the progress of the
organization of events. An e-mail account for the PhD council is created, so that the council can be reached easily. Regularly an e-mail, the PhD-digest, is send around to the PhD community. Via these e-mails the PhD community is informed about events and activities, but also other interesting messages for PhD students are spread. The PhD council has created a Google Drive. All council members have access to this online folder. Documents such as the agenda and minutes of the council meetings, preparation documents for events, slides for presentations and the annual report are saved in this folder. New council members are given access to this folder, so that the continuity of the council and its documents is more easily preserved. Finally a website has been launched where one can find information about the PhD council and the activities it organizes.

Goals
Together with the department board, the following goals have been stated for the PhD council.

Communication with the department
The council should represent the PhD community in discussions on relevant topics such as PhD supervision, work environment, teaching, etc. Tasks for the council include quarterly meetings with the dean of the graduate school, and setting up an infrastructure to communicate messages from the department board to the PhD community and to gather feedback from the PhDs.

Communication inside the PhD community
Currently, many PhD students only know their direct neighbours. Getting to know more people in the department is a great way to increase your network, and can spark interesting research ideas. It would be nice to welcome new PhD students when they join our department. The department board has already agreed to provide some budget for 10 free PhD lunches per year, during which PhDs can present themselves and their group to each other. We need you to organise events like these!

First aid for PhD students (and Postdocs, PDEngs)
Every day PhD students face common problems and challenges, such as “Help, what should I be researching?!”, “Help, I see my supervisor only once a month!”, “Help, I'm in a European project!”, “Help! I don’t have time for research because of the teaching duties!”. Foreign students need to find housing, buy a good but cheap bike, deal with health insurance and the tax office. When going to a conference, we need LaTeX templates for TU/e style presentations and posters. We can help each other a lot by sharing experience, information and resources! The council can assist us in doing so.

PhD students’ future
Once PhD students finish their thesis, only few remain at the same university. Currently we don't keep very good track of where they go. Some PhDs go to other universities, others disappear completely after getting a job in industry. Both from a research perspective and from a networking perspective, it is interesting to keep in touch with these people. The council could keep track of those who finish, and invite them over to give talks or to join our events.
**Communication with the student community**

Students are potential PhD students. The council should be in contact with students and student organisations, bringing our research to the students, and our students to the research. The council may find the ways to involve PhDs into relevant student events, and organize guest lectures for students by PhDs.

**Overview of proceedings**

The PhD council has been constituted two years ago and during this period of time it has set up a wide range of activities. All activities serve the purpose to achieve the goals we have set. Below the activities are described briefly to give an impression of the proceedings and achievements of the council.

**TOP meetings**

Once a month the professors of the department together with some other key figures of the department meet with the departmental board during the TOP meeting. The PhD council participates in this meeting as the chair of the PhD council or another delegate is present. During the TOP meeting information about several topics, both department and university-wide, are communicated by the board. This is an excellent opportunity for the PhD council to be informed about various issues in an early stage. Also, the opinion or other input of the PhD community can be valuable during the discussion of specific topics in this meeting.

**Meeting with the rector magnificus**

In March 2015 the new rector magnificus, Frank Baaijens, has visited our department. As part of this visit he has met the PhD council. During an informal lunch meeting many council members were present to tell the new rector about the PhD council we have set up in this department. We have explained the purpose of the council, and the way we try to obtain our goals. Frank Baaijens appeared to be enthusiastic asking many questions to the council members. It seems that the rector recognizes the value of a PhD council for a department and he might have stimulated other departments to form a PhD council similar to the one we have constituted.

**Connections with the department council**

The last two years a delegate of the PhD council has been member of the department council, causing close relations between the two councils. It is a desirable objective to maintain these links as it keeps both parties informed about the issues that play a role inside the department and inside or between various communities.

**Metaforum move**

Due to the renovation of the Main Building, our department has moved internally in the Metaforum. Since people from the Main Building had to move to the Metaforum, we have left the third floor and rearranged everyone over the remaining floors (4-7). One PhD student has been part of the Klankbordgroep, a small committee that has critically followed the decisions and plans for the move. PhD students have moved to larger rooms that they share with three or four others. In order to keep a friendly working environment we have created a Code of conduct for shared office spaces. Also, there has been the possibility to put separation walls and plants in the offices of PhD students.
Events
The PhD council organizes events to attain the goals stated above. These events are categorized as major events, minor events, and PhD lunches. Major events focus on professional development, require most of the budget, and take place during work hours. For example, one afternoon may be scheduled. PhD Lunches are meetings (both informal and formal) where information is obtained from the community and provided to the community. These are always scheduled during lunch hours, to provide the least amount of pressure on the PhDs schedules. Minor events are meant to increase the community feeling, and are often social and fun outside work hours. In the next paragraph we shall elaborate on the various events organised by the council and how they contributed to the various goals.

General Assembly
At the end of May 2015 the PhD council has organized a general assembly. All PhD students of the department were invited for this meeting. We have reviewed the past year and presented our plans for the next year. We also have asked for input from the audience to get feedback on the PhD council and the activities it organizes. Post-its were available to put all comments and suggestions on. At the end of the meeting we have discussed the suggestions. We have received many ideas for new events (lunches, workshops and social), how to improve our communication and food and we even have welcomed a new council member after this meeting.

Social media
We have created a Facebook group (PhDs @ Math&Comp. Sci TU/e). This group is an informal group for PhDs (and Postdocs) of the Mathematics and Computer Science departmen of the TU/e. Members can post fun stuff to do for PhDs (whether university related or not), exchange photo's of activities, do suggestions and discuss PhD problems you might have. Also on LinkedIn we will create a group, for current and former PhD’s of our department.

Events
Since the inception of the PhD Council, we have organized various events in alignment with the goals formulated for the council. The events are structured distinguishing three types of activities: major events, minor events, or a lunch events.

Major Events
A major event is aimed at enhancing professional skills of PhD through invited talks and hands-on workshops. Experts from outside as well as within the university are invited to advise and guide students to enhance their skills on a particular technical or professional topic. The professional part of the event is followed by some social activity and a borrel or dinner. A major event is organized as a half-day event starting generally in the afternoon on a weekday. The brief description of the major events we organized are provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kick-off meeting + Networking workshop</td>
<td>17-03-2014</td>
<td>The PhD council kickoff meeting was intended to bring the entire PhD community together for the first time. We have introduced the PhD Council to the PhD students and explained its role and structure. The dean Emile Aarts has</td>
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</table>
Given an introductory talk. The Networking workshop was given by a professional external company (Bex). We concluded the evening with a buffet.

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poster Design Workshop</td>
<td>26-11-2014</td>
<td>The aim of the workshop is to learn skills in order to improve technical poster presentations. We invited an external, professional designer and Prof. Jack van Wijk from the TU/e (visualization group) to give two separate talks at the workshop. The event was followed by a borrel and small sinterkaas celebration, aimed at presenting a bit of Dutch culture to international students.</td>
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**Lunch Events**

A lunch event takes place on a weekday during the lunch time, usually from 12.00h to 13.00h. A lunch event can have various themes; including providing updates on recent changes and/or ongoing discussions in the department relevant to the PhD community, meeting with department board, introduction to other ancillary facilities within the department and the university, and talks with personnel from the industry. Below a short summary of the lunches is provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The essence of PhD life</td>
<td>09-09-2014</td>
<td>Informing PhDs about the events planned for the upcoming year and obtaining general feedback on what are pressing issues for the PhD community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board on tour</td>
<td>14-11-2014</td>
<td>Introducing the department board (Dean, Vice-Deans, Managing Director, etc.) to the PhDs. Key features of the interaction: - Who are the board and what do they do? - What are the current developments in the department and how do they affect you as PhD-student? - Will there be a higher load on supervisors and how does this affect your supervision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board on tour - II</td>
<td>01-05-2015</td>
<td>The second lunch with the board was an interactive session. A set of statements were presented to the students and the board members and they had to choose whether they agreed or disagreed with them. After making their choice for each statement a brief discussion was held over the result of this snap-poll to gain further insight.</td>
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**Minor Events**

A minor event is generally a more socially themed event, aimed at bringing the PhD community together in a casual environment. A minor event is generally organized after work hours. Generally a fun activity is chosen that can facilitate meeting and socializing with new people. We also encourage non-council members to volunteer to organize an event they may be particularly interested in. A brief description per event is provided in the table below.
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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Board Game Night</td>
<td>27-05-2014</td>
<td>Board games are known to be popular among PhDs: a few groups within the department have already organized board games evenings. As the event is scheduled after work hours, we have motivated participation of PhDs by providing free dinner (pizza) and drinks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pub Quiz &amp; International Dinner</td>
<td>16-10-2014</td>
<td>A pot-luck style event where participants bring home-cooked meals originating from their home countries. The dinner was followed by a Pub Quiz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie Night</td>
<td>19-05-2015</td>
<td>We organized a little get-together to watch a movie together along with pizza and drinks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerpoint Karaoke</td>
<td>09-04-2015</td>
<td>A presenter selects a to him/her unknown presentation. The presenter gives an instantly improvised presentation about the topic. He/she is as puzzled as the audience about the next slide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Assembly</td>
<td>27-05-2015</td>
<td>An overview of the proceedings of the PhD council till date was presented to a general audience of PhD student of M&amp;CS. Complaints, feedback and suggestions for future activities were discussed. Students were also invited to be part of the council for the coming year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Table foosball tournament</td>
<td>25-06-2015</td>
<td>Teams will battle at the employee social drink to determine who can call themselves the department table foosball champions for a year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer barbecue</td>
<td>31-07-2015</td>
<td>To conclude the academic year all PhD students are invited to enjoy a beer and some grilled meat just before the summer holidays.</td>
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**Attendance**

To give an impression of the attendance of the organized events, we present some results in the figures below. Major events, lunches and minor events are separately presented.
Budget
The department offers the PhD council a yearly budget of 10,000 euro. A significant part of the budget is spent on two major events (professional workshops) per year, which cost approximately 5,000 euros (we estimate each workshop to cost approximately 2,500 euro). With the remaining money we organize social events and lunches. Lunches cost approximately 350 euro per afternoon. The costs of the social events vary depending on the type of event.
Conclusion

Two years ago the PhD council of the department W&I has been created. During the past two years many PhD students from our department have made an effort to set up the PhD council, to state goals for this council and organize the council in such a way to be able to fulfil the goals. The current council members are very proud of all the achievements we have made together and we hope to continue to maintain and shape this initiative.

The first two years the PhD council has primarily focussed on the goals Communication with the department, Communication inside the PhD community and First aid for PhD students as we feel that these are the most important goals. In achieving these goals, various events have been organised which all had a relatively high amount of participants. The challenge for the coming years lies in guaranteeing continuity both in terms of council members as well as attendance with each of the events. In future we will also focus on the remaining goals making sure that the foundation we have established so far will be preserved.